

FOREIGN BRIEFING

Needing a simpler nuclear-freeze plan

By Joseph S. Nye Jr.
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Last week a majority of the voters in eight states and several cities supported the idea of a nuclear freeze. What should we make of these results? On the one hand, freeze proponents properly claim that the

results are a message from the public that "enough is enough." On the other hand, opponents of the freeze point out that the issue did not determine the outcome of many, if any, congressional races.

The election results are consistent with longstanding public attitudes toward our nuclear relationship with the Soviet Union. Polls show the public wants a balance of both peace and strength, with current attention focused on whichever of the two is thought to be neglected. Polls show that two-thirds of Americans support a freeze, though this number drops dramatically if respondents feel a freeze would allow the Soviets to gain somewhat greater nuclear strength than the United States, or to cheat undetected.

Where will the freeze movement go next? One path is to stay with the existing proposal for a mutual and verifiable ban on the production, testing and deployment of all nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. This has the appeal of constancy, but it's likely to have a polarizing effect on opinion — and it's unlikely to force the President to embrace a measure he has already denounced. If a freeze is to succeed, its proponents must find a formulation that both the American and Soviet governments can accept. That path could be a simpler freeze on the number of strategic warheads deployed on both sides.

Advocates of the first path argue that the merit of their proposal outweighs any tactical advantage of a simpler approach. But this is not self-evident. The virtue of the freeze movement has been the revival of public support for the complex subject of arms control by suggesting an apparently simple first step.

But the current freeze proposal tries to take too big a bite at once. It is considered either not as simple as it seems or not verifiable. In either case, the public may come to feel deceived and withdraw its support. Moreover, even those who disagree with the Reagan Administration and believe that a rough parity exists in the US-Soviet nuclear balance see some problems in the current freeze proposal:

A key arms-control objective is to insure that neither side is tempted to strike first in a crisis. Stopping a technological change does not assure crisis stability. Technology is a two-edged sword. Some changes hurt crisis stability, but some forced modernizations can improve it. For example, a freeze in 1959 would have stopped deployment of our invulnerable Polaris submarine-based missiles — that would have made the 1960s less safe. On the other hand, a freeze in 1965 might have avoided the instability caused by the introduction in the '70s of multiple independently tar-

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It is an open question whether a freeze today would enhance crisis stability or not.

Production of nuclear materials is hard to monitor; testing and deployment less so. But ambiguities exist even for deployment. Should we freeze certain delivery systems if we cannot freeze their counter-measures? For example, should we prohibit new, quieter subs or Stealth aircraft if we cannot verifiably freeze antisubmarine warfare or air defenses? What would that do to stability? An ambitious list will need slow negotiations.

MORATORIUM
If negotiations for a freeze are going to be slow and complex, why not spend that time and political capital on negotiating stabilizing measures and reductions? Alternatively, if we negotiate a freeze that stops new US programs that will threaten Soviet land-based missiles in the future, what incentives will the Soviets have to respond to our efforts in the strategic arms-reductions talks to reduce their current threat to our land-based missiles?

Despite these problems, there is merit in the freeze idea if it is reformulated to capture the simplicity summed up in the public's view that "enough is enough," while avoiding the pitfalls described above. A freeze on the number of strategic warheads — each side now deploys roughly 11,000 on systems with ranges over 1,000 miles — would require that any warheads added to the two arsenals would be compensated for by at least an equal number withdrawn.

That would be more consistent with the simplicity that is the great virtue of the freeze idea. It leads to a simple, relevant list of what is to be frozen (strategic warheads). It could be quickly negotiated, and it's verifiable by the already negotiated SALT rules and protocols still observed by both sides. It avoids the potentially dangerous approach of freezing the modernization of certain forces while letting their counter-measures run free. Moreover, it leads quickly to more complex arms-control negotiations without reducing Soviet incentives to bargain.

As Rep. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) said recently: "What we lack today, and what the next Congress will urgently need, is a standard against which to measure nuclear weapons programs." A freeze on strategic warheads followed by negotiations focused on crisis stability could set such a practical standard.

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Congress?

NO
prohibit
(no new weapons)

NO!